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Question: I realise I'm terrified of being judged and hence of judging – it's all wrapped up in the one thing. So what do you do with judgment in the world, where you're called upon to judge and be discerning? Like in the arts, for example, there's no right or wrong but none the less often you're called upon to do that. Recently, particularly in the last six months, I've become more and more disturbed about judgment and getting into conflict more than usual, to the point that sometimes I fall back on, "Okay, this is the ego judging, and I know where it comes from in my family dynamic and stuff." But it's almost like I collapse and don't want to be involved, and yet that doesn't seem to be the name of the game either. Do you have any comment about it, because it's doing my head in?

Linda: Yes, it's what drove me crazy too, realising that I was judging everyone, everything – really myself relative to everything all the time. So I'd say sometimes, yes, have a break from it. But when you're called upon to judge, what do you mean: a competition?

Question: No, working collaboratively, given the charge of overseeing a project, whether a performance is good enough, can a performer go any further than where they are – those kinds of fairly supervisory decisions. It's clear when you're at the bottom of the pack that you do what you're told. But when you're further up the chain and you get into conflicts, particularly with people you work for or alongside – I've come across a couple recently that are totally disturbing.

Linda: As much as possible, forget the rational and just work with your intuition and your gut feeling, which you probably do anyway, and trust that much more than your head, any sort of rational judgment. That's really all you can really do.

Question: And when the gut is running in conflict with someone whose gut is telling them something else?

Linda: Well, what can you do? You just go, "This is what I feel right now. This performer has really affected me. Maybe they're not perfect but they've got something." Then you're probably more likely to pick something like that up. Rather than go by appearances or initial sound or expertise or whatever, just go with your heart as much as possible and your gut feeling. And then you tend to start to trust that more and more. And even though at sometimes it might appear like a rash thing, or completely irrational thing, you start to trust it more and more and see that that's the best way to operate – not with your head.

It's not easy though. And that's why you're doing this now, to keep seeing that, keep seeing your judgments and using the fact that you still judge and you hate doing it, to keep you going with this. Because that's what will keep you going – not the great experiences so much, although they can be inspirational too, but more that you can't stand being *you* anymore, full of these judgments, not wanting to judge and still doing it because it's such a deep-seated habit. And that's what thinking is.

So there's no easy way, there's no black or white. There's just gradually, gradually trusting your feeling and intuition more and more. If you get into trouble, so what. At least you've gone with something you feel is more real.

Question: I'm entirely paranoid of trouble too! I find the more you do this work, the more exposed you become to the world. I find that difficult.

Linda: It is difficult. And you do become more exposed because you stop defending yourself by using whatever, usually by judging someone else. A judgment of someone else is really just trying to defend yourself. And especially at certain stages you can feel very raw and exposed. You get used to different stages.

And yes, people will judge you; people judge me. But in the end, it doesn't stop you being you, being real – just do it whatever. You can't help but do it.

Question: Coming across the fear of being judged, there's also the shame of having judged as well. It's like a whole backlog of stuff. Then there's the mighty spiritual judgment on top of that. It just got very disturbing.

Linda: Well, use that disturbance to keep you going with this, to make you more determined to be free from your judgments.

Question: Is that gut-feeling, intuition, the same as the intelligence you were talking about earlier?

Linda: Yes, it is. And you start to trust your innate intelligence – which is in your body, your gut feeling – rather than your head and everything you're taught, your intellect, your mind. Your body is far more intelligent than any mind, even the greatest, most-amazing intellect – it's far more intelligent than that. You see that when you go beyond the mind how very, very limited it is – it's this very small entity. I remember looking down at it going, "How could I have been sucked in by this? Totally?" It's just so, so limited. So yes, trust your body's innate intuition. Never trust your intellect or your mind.

Linda: Do you want to say something J.?

Question: Yes, the intellect has its uses. And you can use it against itself.

Linda: How?

Question: Well, it stops giving free rein if you use it to oppose itself. If something positive starts to emerge, you look for the opposite, you look for the negative and you cancel things out, you neutralise it.

Linda: Can you give an example of that?

Question: Oh, well... I was just reading last night the English translation of the Heart Sutra – I can't think of any personal example but – it says, "no suffering, no end to suffering, no origin of suffering." So at every point that the mind tries to assert something positive, you can look at it the other way and negate it, so you can stop it building its castles.

Linda: Well yes, but I feel the most effective way is to actually come back to the body to break that cycle.

And that's what happens in the end, there are no opposites. They just cancel themselves out and you're just left with *this*. The language changes because the definitions of certain things change. In a way, there's no right, no wrong. You still need to use words but I think I very rarely use, "wrong." I do use, "right" but it doesn't mean there's a wrong; I don't use it as opposed to wrong, it's just right.

Question: How about, one evening we read the Heart Sutra in English as well?

Linda: Okay.

Question: You can catch your own beliefs; the mind is helpful there. For instance, about fifteen years ago I suddenly realised that I had a belief that there was always somebody somewhere more intelligent, more spiritually advanced, more superior than I was. And I thought, what's the basis of this belief? There was no basis when I examined it. I realised that belief had been a major factor running my life. So the mind can be useful – but also the realisation – you can analyse and can pick these things up and once that unconscious belief is examined, it disappears.

Linda: I feel what you described was more a realisation that your whole life was based on a belief. I see a realisation as something that you realise despite the mind or beyond the mind rather than with the mind.

Question: Yes, I don't want to defend the mind too much. (laughter) It only has words, after all. You try to make your words as accurate and insightful as possible but they're only just words. I once had the experience of trying to speak, and being completely unable to because every expression of the thought that arose in my mind struck me as being completely false. Then I tried again with a different thought and I couldn't utter it. I couldn't because it was in words and somehow they were completely false, they just simply couldn't express the fundamental truth that had seemed to arise in me. So yes, I do agree. I don't want to defend the mind too much but I still think it can be used to counter a lot of undesirable habits, thoughts and beliefs. Anyway, since you asked. You may not agree.

Linda: I'm not sure I agree with the last bit but a lot of what you said, I do. And the thing about the words and expressing the thoughts being pointless – yes, it's true.

I find words useful now because they're not coming from thoughts. I'm not thinking and then talking. And trying to express the inexpressible in words is one of the most creative things you can do, because as you're trying to express it, it's like it intensifies the whole thing and there's this amazing – I don't know what it is. It becomes real in the words and it becomes almost tangible when I'm trying to express this inexpressible thing to you and anyone here, using words as the bridge.

That is the most creative that I feel – when I'm trying to do that. That's the closest I feel to anyone, to anything. So when the words come from somewhere else it's totally different.

Question: The Heart Sutra as written on the sheet is of course – and because it's so old – it's a somewhat formulaic quality; it's not as fresh as when it was uttered by the Buddha. But it still has

some quality in it which you speak of. Indeed it strikes me that when I read it, it really moved me last night, like a true icon. The word "icon" is misused now. It used to mean an object that, the contemplation of, brings one into a deeper state. So a statue of the Buddha, by sitting and gazing at it, you can fall into the state that the Buddha was in. It struck me that the Heart Sutra is an icon – as I read it something moved through me.

Linda: Yes, I feel the same about it.

I didn't feel the full force of it until I was actually in Japan where it was originated; I'm not sure if it originated there.

Question: No, it goes back to the Buddha. So it would have been taken to China and then Japan.

Linda: Well, it wasn't till I heard it then that it really started to affect me. It had affected me before that but there, I really felt something. I know there are quite a few people who are into Indian chanting who don't particularly like Japanese chanting but when you're there doing it, it does do something to you. Same probably as when you're in India chanting it. Someone said recently it really awakens the heart. That's what the Heart Sutra did to me. You chant it quite a few times during the day in Japan. It's really beautiful.

Question: I realised during today's sittings that I've actually wanted a foot in both camps with mind and body. I've thought somehow the mind, the intellect, would be a useful tool – once I'm enlightened of course – and that would be okay and that was possible. But when you talked like you did earlier, I picked up that no, I'm wrong. This time I really saw that I can't have it both ways, and that a lot of the incredible pressure, exhaustion, that I was feeling sometimes moving into my body and really being deeply embodied was because I was battling this other part. When I finally realised that I can't have it both ways this heaviness that had been in my head just went away.

Since then there's been a sense of real lightness which has been lovely, and a lot less pain. And connected with that, over time I've been shedding things off me and letting go. Now it feels the letting go is actually letting go of me – like going into free-fall from an airplane. A very different quality of letting go, more the whole of me letting go, presumably the me parts that's the mind. So somewhere they're connected, and also connected with how I battle with that mind, because I've been rewarded and appreciated for my mind, and how I work and what I do with it. I've heard people say things like, "The mind is a great servant but a bad master," so there's the idea that I could keep it. Now, I don't know what's going to be there when it's gone but the deal's done really, and it's worth it.

Linda: Very good. Excellent.

I felt, "Oh, yes, I'm going to become enlightened. I'll still be me. Tra-la-la, I'll be enlightened and feel great all the time but I'll still be me, I still want to keep that, but I'll be enlightened." And that's impossible, it's the total opposite of that. So yes, that's a great realisation.

Question: And now the thing that I've been doing every single sit is just counting, just coming back to my breath. Simple, right back to basics and watching what happens. Not watching – being with what happens. That's been hard and easy. I wasn't going to say anything but that hasn't happened. (laughing)

Linda: Yes, that's really good. And that's what Roshi Sama says in the talk that I read out sometimes: just stick to the basic practice; who are you to think that you can muck around with it and make it better? It's what a lot of people trying to do these days, short cuts, "Oh, this is a better way." Just stick with the basic practice. And it works, it really does.

People talk about my teaching. It's not mine, it's just what I was taught. I'm just teaching through my own experience, which was through someone else's experience. Maybe I've combined a couple of things. I don't want to be a Zen Buddhist teacher but this is back-to-basics Zen practice – maybe Westernised slightly, but really this is what you do in a Zen monastery.

Question: This started when I was driving over here and I realised that I had a pain in my leg, which is very common for me. Instead of moving and trying to get comfortable with it, I just let it be and just watched it and let it sit there and just sat through the driving and discomfort. An extraordinary thing happened: I suddenly got very sensitive in the car and started itching and scratching. Then I went, "I'm probably like this all the time. I've just never noticed it." Carrying that forward into my meditation this time in the retreat, when I'm in pain I've been watching – obviously the pain can be quite intense – but what else is going on around the pain? And again I felt these less-intense sensations in my body in funny places like my foot, and insects crawling on my face – but obviously there are no insects on my face – but none the less all these strange sensation. My question is, what I'm watching, is it just everything that I'm watching, whatever's coming up, just be aware of it and watch it?

Linda: Yes, just watch everything. And the clearer you become, the more you see. You'll head one thing off and then it will appear somewhere else, you'll get different sensations. You have to watch everything, not just focus on one thing. If you focus on one thing you're going to miss everything else. But it takes a lot of alertness to be sitting there for a long time just watching.

And watching is quite difficult. Watching without becoming engaged in something or trying to manipulate or change it takes a lot of energy. So yes, just keep watching: watch your reactions, watch everything, every little nuance, every tiny reaction. It's not the pain so much or the sensations that you're really watching, it's your reaction to it, because that's tied in with the sensation.

Question: The other things that's been coming up for me is watching my breathing. Something you said I really took to heart – the breath is always changing. Somehow I have this habit of expecting my breathing to be all the same. So when I'm watching my breathing, obviously it's not all the same, but what has helped me is to accept that sometimes it's not the same and it's not always this steady, rhythmic breathing, it's happening differently. That's really helped me to just watch it, to watch what it does rather than my idea of how it should be. I don't know if those two things are linked.

Linda: Everything changes. Everything is always changing. But what we do with our mind is resist everything, and try and control things and manipulate things – whereas if you step back and just watch you see everything is just flowing and changing. You come back to the breath which is also changing but it's not to control the breath but more to use it as some sort of anchor. Use the body as an anchor.

Question: Yes, this time in the retreat when I see pain I do go back to my breath and watch that. That somehow is an anchor for me in that situation. And from watching the breath, other things arise within that sphere of activity. So I can be watching my breath and I can feel an itch, I can feel the pain and I can hear things around me. If I manage to be aware of my breath that seems to help and give me some point of reference to come from.

Linda: Yes, you use it as your reference point. And the stiller you become, the more you see the movement, whereas when you're totally involved in the movement of thinking you don't see anything. You just think, "That's who I am, that's what I am." But when you stop you can really start to see what's going on. And that's one of the reasons we keep our bodies still, so we haven't got that added distraction of movement. So it's good to practice while you're moving as well and that's why we do the walking. But sitting still, watching – nothing beats that, really.

Question: This is just a silly thing that happened with my breath this morning you might enjoy hearing, because at the end of the sit I just apologised to everybody for the noise I made. I just couldn't stop yawning. My mouth was like a hippopotamus' mouth – I couldn't stop and tears were pouring out my face and I couldn't stop yawning.

Linda: That can happen sometimes. I've been through that too, the yawning. You can't stop it. I think it's just a release of tension.